

## Coloradans For Clean Air Newsletter

### Barbara's Column

*On A Clear Day* offers a forum to exchange useful and timely information about the national oxygenated fuel mandate put into place by the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments. We believe in this program and the contributions these blended fuels can make to clean air efforts. Our purpose in publishing the newsletter is to pass along both positive and negative experiences from different parts of the country. *On a Clear Day* will emphasize successful strategies used by the people responsible for local programs.

On October 1, 1992, President Bush took several steps intended to ensure the fuel-neutral, oxygenated fuel program that Congress intended when the Amendments were passed. Coloradans for Clean Air supports fuel neutrality for several reasons. A two-oxygenate marketplace permits consumer choice and enhances public acceptance of the mandate. It provides lower gasoline prices to consumers by encouraging competition. Finally, it helps to ensure market availability of ethanol which offers the greatest carbon monoxide reduction of fuels currently sold in America.

*Continued on page 5*

### How to Survive the First Year of Your Oxygenated Gasoline Program

by

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On November 1, 1992, Colorado will begin its sixth year of operating a successful oxygenated gasoline program. By this time, operation and enforcement have become almost routine. However, "routine" was far from our vocabulary back in 1987, when we began the nation's first oxygenated gasoline program. "Panic," "overwhelmed," "stressed out," not to mention many phrases not suitable for print here, were very much a part of our vocabulary. Through this article, I hope to share some of our experiences with others who are now implementing oxygenated gasoline programs.

While countless regulatory and administrative activities are involved in the implementation of an oxygenated gasoline program, many of these are spelled out in EPA guidelines or state law and end up being relatively cut and dried. If you are responsible for

starting a program, you may be overwhelmed, but you won't have any trouble gaining access to the regulatory requirements. It will be much more difficult to deal with the absolutely essential activities that aren't outlined in any procedural manual.

With 20/20 hindsight, I can clearly say that the one area we would have put more emphasis on "if we knew then what we know now," is public education.

### Public Education

"Oxygenated gasoline" was not always a household word in Denver. Chances are it is a new term to your area — new to motorists, new to auto mechanics, even new to gasoline retailers. For an oxygenated gasoline program to be successful, these key groups must be knowledgeable and supportive of the program.

*Continued on page 4*

### In This Issue:

**Vehicle Performance •**

**Page 2**

**Bush on Oxyfuels •**

**Page 5**

**Downstream Alternatives  
Information Bulletin •**

**Page 7**

## **The First Year** from page 1

### **Heading Off Trouble**

We underestimated the initial outcry and backlash from the oil industry, press, and the public in Colorado. Because of this, we spent a considerable amount of time the first year in "damage control activities," i.e., countering negative press articles, providing technical assistance to mechanics who were mis-diagnosing vehicle problems and blaming the fuels, and countering incorrect and unfounded information being circulated by lobbyists who were opposed to the program.

### **"Start by educating and dispelling unfounded myths among your own staff . . ."**

As much as possible, try to stay ahead of this curve! Be pro-active in getting information out on oxygenated gasolines. Try to make the public's first impression of oxygenated gasolines a positive one. Start by educating and dispelling unfounded myths among your own staff who will be dealing with the public. Call upon the assistance of media specialists within your organization to develop a media and damage control plan. It's likely the staff involved in the operation and enforcement of the oxygenated gasoline program have technical/scientific backgrounds and have little to no experience in "media management." Let the experts help you!

### **Handling the Crush of Calls**

In the early weeks of our program, we quickly realized we did not have adequate staffing to process all the phone and written inquiries we were receiving on oxygenated gasolines. Two things saved us—a hotline and a form letter.

The "hotline" was actually two telephone answering machines, which recorded calls around the clock. We hired a high school auto vocational education teacher on a part-time basis, to clear the calls every evening. The person we hired had the technical competence of Mr. Goodwrench and the patience of Job. I strongly recommend you look for a person with

similar qualifications! The first year we processed an estimated 2600 oxygenated gasoline calls using the hotline. Just to assure you things get better over time, last year we received fewer than a dozen calls.

While no one likes a "form letter," if it is written correctly, it will address the inquirer's concerns, be flexible, and not appear to be a form letter at all. We wrote generic paragraphs to address the general areas on which we were receiving inquiries such as fuel economy, material compatibility, and vehicle performance. Program staff reviewed letters and gave instructions to clerical staff to assemble a response letter from the "canned" responses. With little or no changes, the assembled form letter could be sent out. Using this approach, we were able to provide timely responses to the several hundred letters received by our office, as well as by the Governor's office, during the first year of the program.

### **Get the Mechanics on Your Side**

Another important element of a first year program (and beyond) is training for auto mechanics. A good mechanic is trained and knowledgeable in vehicle fuel system design and repair. However, mechanics generally receive little or no training in gasoline composition. They will, however, have an opinion on gasoline (and oxygenated gasoline), they will express their opinion to their customers, and they will be viewed by their customers as experts in this area. Do them and yourself a favor by providing them with good, factual information on oxygenated gasolines.

Depending on time and budget, several approaches can be used for mechanic training. Publications on oxygenated gasolines which are geared for mechanics are available and can be distributed through vocational schools, trade associations, and mechanic testing/certification centers. Seminars can be held to "train trainers," i.e., hold classes for auto vocational instructors, auto service managers, etc., allowing you to network to a larger audience. In addition to these approaches, in Colorado we also held numerous free mechanic training classes at various locations throughout our oxygenated gasoline program area. We found auto dealerships and vocational schools to be good locations. Mechanics were familiar with these locations, and dealerships and schools were very supportive of our efforts.

*Continued page 6*

## The First Year from page 4

### Use Established Networks To Spread The Word

We printed and distributed a brochure on oxygenated gasolines, which described the program design and requirements. Ethanol and MTBE producers also printed and distributed brochures on each of their respective products. Many provided us copies for our own distribution network. In addition, we accommodated numerous requests from service groups, church organizations, schools, and clubs for presentations on oxygenated gasolines.

### Beyond Year One

After the first year of implementation, when people learn through experience that their vehicles perform satisfactorily on "that government gas," they go on to more pressing matters in their life than what individual components are in their gasoline. Today in Colorado, we receive fewer calls on oxygenated gasoline than on most other air pollution programs we administer. We believe this is in large part due to the passive nature of an oxygenated gasoline program, which does not require any change in motorists' lifestyles in order to achieve air pollution reductions.

If you're just starting the first year of your program, you don't have to feel as alone as we did in 1987. Programs are in place throughout the country now, and a growing network of experienced professionals is available to help with any problems that do come up in your area.

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Printed on  Recycled Paper

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Coloradans For Clean Air Newsletter

Volume 1, Number 1 • October, 1992

On a Clear Day is published by  
Coloradans for Clean Air  
1985 Grape Street  
Denver, Colorado 80220  
Phone: 303.388.4858  
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